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ABSTRACT

Students assessed as high risk at Essex Community College (Maryland) were paired by identical scores on vocabulary and reading comprehension tests and as to whether they elected to take a learning skills course (N=56) or to ignore advice and not take the course (N=67). The learning skills course uses a programmed multimedia approach and as much individual attention as possible to attain goals set by the student in a learning skills contract. A significant advantage in grade point average was demonstrated by the students attending the program, who also took an average of three more hours of college work than their counterparts. Students who did not accept the college recommendation of getting learning center support tended to be older and took a greater range of the number of standard three credit academic courses. Of learning skills students, 82% returned to their studies the following semester compared to 59% of non-learning skills students. An appendix contains the procedure for the Tennessee Self Concept Scale which was used in the learning skills program student contract. (MB)

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HIGH RISK STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A PAIRED STUDY

by Ken Bourn

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HIGH RISK STUDENTS IN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

A PAIRED STUDY

KEN BOURN

6/78

Are you getting dizzy watching your open-door revolve? Essex Community College in Baltimore County, Maryland may have found a solution for you.

Data accumulated during the first semester of 1978 gives heart to the hope that the revolving door may be stopped or at least slowed down. One hundred twenty-three high risk students were analyzed in a pairing study. Vocabulary and reading comprehension test scores from the student's entrance evaluation were used to identify "pairs". Fifty-six students who elected to select the Learning Skills, RDG 021, program were "paired" with sixty-seven students who chose to ignore the advice of the college and not select the Learning Skills program. In some cases, one student who chose to take the program had identical entrance scores to several students who were not in Learning Skills. Because of this situation, some "pairs" were made up of three or even four students. However, each student in a given "pair" had identical scores in vocabulary and reading comprehension upon entrance to the college. In this way, fifty-three "pairs" were formed.

The focus of the Learning Skills program, RDG 021, is always the unique individual instructional need of the student. Since individualized one-to-one instruction is impractical because of personnel and time restrictions; a programmed/multimedia approach with as much individual attention as possible is used as the most expeditious and effective means of assisting the high risk student. The ERIC studies ED 129-394 and ED 140-878 can provide more specific information about the day-to-day operation of the program.

NOTE: Appendix summarizes the technique.

Results of the study would indicate that the semester ending quality point average of the "paired" students who selected the Learning Skills program were as follows:

Quality point average	Number of Students	Percent of group
0 - 1	11	19.6
1.1 - 2	21	37.4
2.1 - 3	20	35.6
3.1 - 4	4	7.1

Students who chose not to select Learning Skills as one of their classes had the following results in the semester ending quality point average.

Quality point average	Number of Students	Percent of group
0 - 1	22	37.4
1.1 - 2	14	23.8
2.1 - 3	13	22.1
3.1 - 4	5	8.5

A significant advantage in quality point average was demonstrated by the students attending the Learning Skills program.

Student age was an area of difference identified in the study. The age of the students in the Learning Skills program were as follows:

Age	Number of Students	Percent of group
19	34	57.8
20	13	22.1
21	1	1.7
22	1	1.7
24	1	1.7
28	1	1.7
32	1	1.7
34	1	1.7
36	1	1.7
38	1	1.7

Age of students not attending Learning Skills were as follows:

Age	Number of Students	Percent of group
18	1	1.7
19	24	42.8
20	14	21.4
21	4	7.1
22	4	7.1
23	1	7.1

Age	Number of Students	Percent of group
24	3	5.1
25	2	3.4
28	1	1.7
31	1	1.7

Older students tended not to accept the college recommendation of getting Learning Skills support.

In the area of accepting the challenge of standard three credit academic courses, the students in Learning Skills courses responded as follows:

Number of three credit courses	Number of Students	Percent of group
0	1	1.7
1	11	18.7
2	21	37.4
3	16	27.2
4	7	11.8

Students not attending Learning Skills chose three credit academic courses as follows:

Number of three credit courses	Number of Students	Percent of group
0	2	3.4
1	11	18.7
2	20	35.7
3	15	25.5
4	6	10.2
5	5	8.5

A greater range of the number of standard three credit academic courses was selected by the students who did not chose to attend Learning Skills.

The number of hours attempted during the semester by students in the Learning Skills program were as follows:

Hours attempted	Number of students	Percent of group
0 - 3	1	1.7
4 - 6	1	1.7
7 - 9	3	5.0
10 - 12	11	19.6
13 - 15	29	49.3
16 - 18	10	17.0

Students not selecting Learning Skills attempted semester hours as follows:

Hours attempted	Number of Students	Percent of group
0 - 3	4	6.8
4 - 6	9	15.3
7 - 9	11	18.7
10 - 12	17	28.9
13 - 15	16	27.2
16 - 18	1	1.7

As indicated, students who chose to accept the college advice to take Learning Skills also took more hours of college work.

A characteristic of the students who accepted Learning Skills as a part of their program was that they returned to their studies the following semester. Of the students selecting Learning Skills during the semester reported in this study, eighty-two percent returned the following semester. Of the students not choosing to take advantage of Learning Skills, fifty-nine percent returned the following semester.

The variance in the number of students not enrolled in Learning Skills reported in this study, sixty-seven, and the totals reported in areas of the study should be noted. Four students withdrew from their scheduled classes during the semester thus it was decided unfair to the study to compute their zero quality point average into the study. Eight additional students did not follow through with class registration after taking the entrance evaluation. These students were not computed for quality point average; however, it is felt that it is significant that of the one hundred twenty-three students evaluated only eight chose not to follow through with their plans to attend college. Ninety-five percent of the students, learning of their high-risk nature, felt secure enough with the supportive environment of the college course structure to follow through. It was only two and one half percent which withdrew during the semester. Pre-enrollment evaluation does not deter students from college.

Among the benefits accrued by the high-risk students attending the Learning Skills course were: achieving quality point average at one to two full points higher than students of the same ability who did not attend the course, and further, this higher quality point average was attained while the students were carrying a load averaging three hours greater than their "paired" counterpart. Of benefit to the college was the twenty-nine percent higher retention rate shown among the students of Learning Skills for the following semester.

Additionally, it can be assumed that this obvious transfer of learning skills will continue to be a cornerstone upon which other skills will be built, thus increasing learning possibilities.

APPENDIX

THE PROCEDURE

The TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE was selected as the objective scale for measuring the change in the student's self concept. This scale acknowledges Abraham Maslow's contention that a positive level of self-esteem is the final prerequisite for self-actualization. Therefore, it is self concept which serves as an index or criterion of self-actualization. The greatest resource in the rehabilitation of any individual is the individual himself. This rehabilitation is a process of helping the individual to utilize and actualize his own potentialities. This scale has a wide variety of studies related to it.

Disadvantages of the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE are that it tries to measure a subjective intangible and that is a verbal paper-and-pencil situation.

As a part of this initial interview,the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE by Dr. William H. Fitts was administered to each student. The basic skills development program at Essex Community College in Baltimore County, Maryland, is identified as Learning Skills - Reading 021. It is a three hour, non-credit, individualized, programmed, laboratory experience. During personal interviews each student is contracted to work toward a <u>self defined</u> resolution of his skill deficiencies as he perceived them.

A copy of this LEARNING SKILLS CONTRACT follows:

BASIC SKILLS CONTRACT

1 Name:

Date:

Phone:

3 Observable behavior which will indicate that the problem no longer exists:

Third level goal:

Second level goal:

First level goal:

2 Observable behavior which indicates that there is a problem:

ORAL CONTRACT:

"I agree to be honest even though at times it may be difficult to do so."

"I agree to be responsible for my behavior when we are together and when I am outside of this interview."

Student signature:

Reinforcers:

_____ factual report

_____ change in feeling and attitude

_____ change in environment

_____ verbal support by the instructor

Follow up:

_____ modify the contract

_____ set a new contract

_____ discontinue the program

The student first affixes his name, the date and his phone number to the upper right hand corner of the Learning Skills Contract. Secondly, the student writes a description of the observable behavior which indicates to him that there is a problem in the space provided. A Reading Specialist can glean a great deal of information from the way a student expresses his feelings about his weaknesses. After describing his problem, the student then moves his attention up the paper to the area numbered three. At this point, the student identifies the observable behavior which will indicate to him that the problem no longer exists. Once again, the Reading Specialist has insight into the student's situation as he sees it and as it exists in relation to the world of reality. With the student, the instructor reads the Oral Contract; discussion may follow and the student signs the contract.

In conference with the student, the instructor evaluates the student's problem and his goal. Easily achievable "middle" goals are assigned to the student by the instructor. These assignments are written into the contract as the first, second and third level goals. Working up the paper, from the problem to the solution has a positive psychological effect.

Reinforcers are discussed between the instructor and the student. More than one reinforcer may be used in a contract. If the decision is to use factual reports as a reinforcer, testing with standardized tests is in order. The instructor should help direct the student to the reinforcers which would be most rewarding to the student. Some students do not do well in testing situations. Counseling relative to the student's change in feeling and attitude may be a rewarding reinforcer. Warmth and understanding can be very helpful to a student with a low self concept. Material rewards are common forms of behavior modification; they may also be very dangerous traps for both the student and the instructor. The instructor needs to stay aware of his limitations and those of the student while trying to help the student become independent.

Verbal support from the instructor may be all the student needs to overcome a history of hostile educational situations. As many honest reinforcers should be used as possible.

Evaluation of the student's contracts was made (1) upon request of the student, (2) as established goals were reached, or (3) on a weekly basis. The conclusion of the evaluation resulted in the establishment of a revised contract or reaffirmation of the existing contract. Personal circumstances, areas of interest, and levels of success were justification for adjustment in the level, speed, scope or even the subject of the student's efforts. This adjustment is recorded in the follow-up area of the contract form. In this way, each contract is terminated before a new contract is undertaken. A student would be working on only one contract at a time. However, the student may terminate a contract at any point in the contract and set forth on a new contract.

Acceptance of the student's evaluation of himself as the focal point for contracting throws the onerous of responsibility squarely on the shoulders of the student. Many students have never before been the masters of their areas of learning. The instructor counsels the student as to the possible consequences of his choices; however, the contract is one between equal partners in the educational process.

The instructional method and materials used in this program are not unique. In this study, most of the materials were student course related texts or trade manuals having a high probability of immediate reward and removing the need for transfer learning. The instruction was casual tutoring to an immediate need, or programmed review of tutored skills for the purpose of mastery. The subject of the text or manual was not tutored - the use of the text was tutored. Vocabulary, comprehension, spelling, writing and speed skills were at the base of most tutoring.

Mid-semester course evaluations were rendered by the students and adjustments were made. At the end of the semester the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE was administered again, and an open ended subjective success questionnaire was completed by each student.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation of the TENNESSEE SELF CONCEPT SCALE results were as follows:

(1) The pretest totals for each of the fifteen subtests were determined by adding the results of each of the six items identified within each subtest:

(2) Calculation of the potential growth was accomplisned by subtracting the pretest total from 450. (Each item is rated from one to five. There are six items in each of the fifteen subtests.)

(3) The post test totals were determined in the same manner as the pretest totals after the sixteen week instructional period.

(4) Actual growth for each student was ascertained by subtracting the pretest score from the post test score.

(5) Extent of the student's self concept change is rated as a percent of the actual growth score in relation to the potential growth.

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